DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 210 693 CS 206 670

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TITLE The Technical Writing Consortium: Two-Year--Four-Year Cooperation.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Technical Community Conference (28th, Pittsburgh, PA, May 20-23, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Articulation (Education); Community Colleges; *Consortia; Higher Education; *Intercollegiate Cooperation; Program Development; Shared Services; *Technical Writing

ABSTRACT

Membership in a technical writing consortium is advantageous both to the local university and to the neighboring community colleges because the consortium guarantees accreditation of the community college courses while increasing enrollment in the advanced technical writing courses and internship programs of the university. An area-wide consortium can be advantageous to the community colleges because it sets the standards that will guarantee the transfer of community college credits to the university. Sharing the expense of guest speakers and field trips with other schools is another benefit. For initial implementation, one school, usually the university, must take the initiative in forming the consortium. Catalog descriptions of existing courses must be studied, the level of instruction and the course objectives discussed and agreed upon, and the same textbooks selected. The consortium can also plan a common syllabus and a general day by day schedule stipulating the number and types of papers to be written. An informal consortium usually has a rotating directorship funded by the director's own school for a designated period. A formally structured consortium has a permanent director funded through federal, state, or private grants. Whether loosely organized or very formally structured, the consortium can develop a program vital to the prestige of the local university and the area community colleges and provide the expertise that will guarantee its continued success. (Included is a description of the Southeast Kansas Technical Writing Consortium.) (HOD)

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THE TECHNICAL WRITING CONSORTIUM: TWO-YEAR -- FOUR-YEAR COOPERATION

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Membership in a technical writing consortium is advantageous both to the local university and the neighboring community colleges because the consortium guarantees accreditation of the community college courses and increases enrollment in the advanced technical writing courses and internship programs of the university. This paper describes the textbook, syllabus, daily schedule and writing assignments suitable for member schools. The continuing success of the informal consortium and of the formally structured consortium--federally or privately funded--depends primarily on the leadership of the director, the commitment of the administrations and the number of participating schools.

Dynamic technical writing programs, cooperatively planned and administered by a consortium, can benefit both the local university and the neighboring community colleges. Such programs establish close professional ties among the faculty of the participating schools and provide a needed community service as they revitalize English departments by attracting students from all departments on campus and from the community itself.

RECIPROCAL BENEFITS

An area wide technical writing consortium can be advantageous to the community colleges because it sets the standards that will guarantee the transfer of community college credits to the university. Sharing the expense of guest speakers and field trips with other schools in the consortium is also beneficial. Certainly, the prestige that comes with course accreditation, with well-known speakers and with shared teaching materials is desirable at the community college level.

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There are also advantages for the four-year university that forms a consortium with community colleges. Such cooperation is a valuable recruitment tool; cooperation instead of competition attracts community college transfer students to the university. These transfer students can bolster enrollment in the advanced technical writing courses and in the internship programs. Further, community college faculty can develop new job opportunities in their respective areas for university interns.

INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION

One school, often the university, must take the initiative in forming the comsortium. A technical writing coordinator who has contacts with area community colleges can meet with the community college technical writing instructors on an informal level to discuss the needs of the students enrolled in each school. Catalog descriptions of existing technical writing courses can be studied. Once course prerequisites, the level of instruction, and the objectives are discussed and agreed upon, then the detailed work of the technical writing consortium begins.

Using the same textbook will draw participating schools closer together, and selection of that textbook is a key decision. It must include specimen writing from all areas of the job market and must have a wide range of writing assignments suitable for the community college students enrolled in two-year technical and industrial programs, for non-traditional students who may be employed full time in the community and may be enrolled in only one course as a special student, and for the baccalaureate degree candidates who will continue in a graduate school program. The most suitable textbooks are those which include specimen writing from technicians and professionals actually working in their respective fields.

When all schools in the consortium use the same textbook, they can also agree on the content of the introductory technical writing course. The consortium can plan a common syllabus and day by day schedule in rather general terms, stipulating the number and types of papers to be written.

Then instructors in each school can individualize the syllabus with specific writing assignments appropriate for their own students. The sophomore level technical writing course for the community colleges requires the most flexibility in assignments because it serves the needs of so many different types of students. The university technical writing instructors, either working alone or with others in the consortium, can schedule writing assignments that will prepare their students to handle successfully the report writing which will be required of them in the lower management positions they will fill after graduation. Their topics will reflect the additional training they have had in their major areas. Other writing assignments can develop the skills required in graduate school programs.

Students at every level and in every technical field and profession will be writing mostly for other knowledgeable professionals and must produce writing that tends to be more informative than persuasive. Early in the semester the various methods of exposition can be taught (technical definition, technical description, explanation of a process, instructions and analysis), some in a context--free framework. Later in the semester, several of these methods of exposition can be combined to produce feasibility, progress and formal reports, each pertaining to the students' major areas.

In addition to textbook selection, syllabus writing, and assignment planning, members of the technical writing consortium can also in their annual or semi-annual meetings articulate grading philosophies, exchange ideas on

classroom activities and information on guest speakers and field trips to government and industrial technical writing installations. Such an idea exchange provides valuable input both at the community college and university level.

THE INFORMAL CONSORTIUM

The informal consortium usually has a rotating directorship funded by the director's own school for a designated period. This type of consortium seems to be preferable for schools with smaller enrollments in sparsely populated areas. A rotating directorship allows each school to preserve its own autonomy and encourages the participating schools eventually to share the operating expenses, each director's own school providing the funding and services necessary for the specified period. Often the director performs his duties on an overload basis in addition to his regular teaching duties and committee work.

THE FORMAL CONSORTIUM

Establishment of an informal consortium is usually the first step toward a formally structured consortium with a permanent director funded through federal, state, or private grants. Federal or private funding can be secured to develop the cooperative program already underway as long as each school listed in the application shows its commitment to the consortium both on the faculty and administrative levels.

Information about federal grants available for the funding of technical writing consortia can be found in the CATALOG OF DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE, in the IRS ANNUAL REPORT FORMS--AR 990, and in an April issue of the FEDERAL REGISTER. Information about state funding can be requested from each secretary of state. A list of private foundations interested in funding education projects can be found in the FOUNDATION DIRECTORY, FOUNDATION GRANTS INDEX, and the ANNUAL REGISTER OF GRANT SUPPORT. They include Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation,

Lilly Endowment, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Exxon Education Foundation and the General Electric Foundation. A computer search can provide the specifics of individual projects, amount of the grants and duration of the funding period.

There are specific steps in writing a successful proposal. After sources of funding have been located and information requested, each funding source must be analyzed and studied carefully. Contacts on the informal level must be developed. Books that would be helpful in preparing a grant proposal would include Krathwohl's HOW TO PREPARE A RESEARCH PROPOSAL and Lefferts' GETTING A GRANT. In the written proposal, most foundations ask for a brief introduction that includes a biography of the applicant and of the personnel involved, a statement of the existing problem, methods of solving the problem, evaluation of the probable effectiveness of the proposed project, and a budget. Usually the abstract is written last, and then several follow-up letters are written before the funding decision is announced.

Funding can be used to hire a full-time or half-time director, to provide an office and secretarial help, and to offer a more highly structured program and comprehensive services which might include the establishment of a central technical writing library. These libraries can house textbooks written especially for community college students enrolled in two-year technical and industrial programs, textbooks for university students training for lower level management positions and graduate schools, and textbooks that contain such a wide range of writing assignments and specimen writing that they are suitable for students at both the community college and university level. Some texts are so comprehensive that they can be used in both introductory and advanced courses. In the last decade several collections of essays representative of scholarship in the technical writing field have become available.

THE SOUTHEAST KANSAS TECHNICAL WRITING CONSORTIUM

The technical writing consortium in southeast Kansas is very loosely structured. This informal type of consortium was formed at the instigation of Pittsburg State University to relieve the pressures of overcrowding in introductory technical writing courses. All our sections of technical writing were being filled each semester; additional degree programs were requiring technical writing each year. Because we did not have the funding to offer as many sections as were needed, we decided that encouraging sophomore level technical writing courses at area community colleges would decrease enrollment in our introductory courses and perhaps increase enrollment in our advanced technical writing courses. We also believed that it would be better to assist the community colleges in developing acceptable introductory courses instead of allowing them to develop courses that might be basically remedial English courses or extensions of freshman English and therefore perhaps not eligible for transfer credit.

Three area community colleges were invited to participate in a very informal type of consortium; two accepted. As coordinator of the technical writing program at Pitt State, I met first with the English faculty of each school. We discussed the goals and objectives of the introductory Pitt State technical writing course, the needs of the sophomore level students enrolled at their institutions, and finally the advantages of the consortium for each participating school.

At subsequent group meetings we agreed that our overall objective should be to train our students to write the reports required of them in their first years on the job. We agreed that we could best reach our objective by insisting on a prerequisite of two semesters of freshman English or the equivalent. We agreed that our students should write several short reports during the class period to simulate writing under pressure on thejob and

should write a longer, formal report requiring some library skills and some training in their major areas. The short reports should be revised.

Each school published approximately the same course description in its catalog:

> Introduction to Technical Writing. 3 hours. Practice in writing technical descriptions and definitions, instructions, explanations of processes, progress reports, lab reports, formal reports, and basic business correspondence with emphasis on audience analysis, organization, style and format. Prerequisites: English Composition 101 and 102.

Our next step was to select a textbook which included the specimen writing and writing assignments appropriate for our three types of students: BASIC TECHNICAL AND BUSINESS WRITING published by Iowa State University Press in 1979.

Using this text, we wrote a syllabus and day by day schedule which included reading assignments, eight short reports (seven of which were to be written in class) and the formal report. Article--report, memo, letter and blank forms were to be used. The syllabus was written in rather general terms:

> February 9 - Chapter 4 continued (explanations of processes)
>
> February 11 - Paper 3
>
> February 13 - Revision of Paper 3

Instructors in each participating school individualized the syllabus with specific writing assignments appropriate for their own students.

The following writing assignments could be used for students enrolled in a two-year associate degree program:

1. Explain a basic testing procedure used in your major area.

2. Analyze career opportunities in your chosen field.

3. Propose a solution to some current problem at your school: parking, vandalism, loss of library books etc.

4. Write a letter of inquiry to a local company. You need this information for the formal report you are writing in technical writing.

5. Write a formal report on the techniques used in electric arc welding.

6. Assume that you are the president of a campus organization. Write a memo informing members of your group that they must come to a two-hour study session each week.

Since non-traditional students may be employed full-time in the community, the report forms used by their employers can be incorporated into their assignments. The following writing assignments would be appropriate for them:

1. Write instructions telling a new employee how to perform some process.

2. Write a memo to your supervisor recommending the purchase of a piece of equipment to be used on the job.

3. It is the end of the fiscal year. Write a follow-up letter to your charge account customers who have done business with you during the last year.

4. An ecology spokesman has written a letter in which he has accused the company you work for of air pollution. He has challanged you to a public discussion of the problem to be broadcast over a local TV station. Answer the letter.

5. Write four expanded definitions of a tool or piece of equipment you use in your work, each one suitable for a different audience: (1) president of the company, (2) workers in your department, (3) third graders and (4) foreign visitors.

6. Propose that the Company Beautification Committee take a specific action to improve a certain area of the grounds.

University students who are enrolled in four-year degree programs and who have had additional training in their major areas would find the following assignments profitable:

1. Select a technical periodical to which you might reasonably submit an article. Write a detailed analysis of that periodical.

2. Examine the papers you have already written in this course. Select one that would be suitable for publication in a technical or semitechnical periodical that you have examined. Rework the paper so that it meets the standards of the periodical.

3. Write a feasibility study determining whether or not existing equipment should be repaired or replaced.

4. Write a formal report in which you explain the various treatments for the emotional problems related to advanced alcoholism and evaluate their effectiveness.

5. Analyze the advantages of no-fault divorce.

5. Assume that you are a first year teacher. Write an unsolicited proposal to your school board suggesting that a certain course be added to the curriculum.

Some writing assignments are appropriate for all students:

1. Write (1) a thorough, professional resume which effectively emphasizes

your unique strengths as a job applicant and (2) a covering letter of application which highlights and supplements the resume. Apply to an actual company, organization, institution or agency to the appropriate person by name. Apply for a specific job for which you are qualified based upon your education, interests, and experiences.

2. Assume that you have written an unsolicited letter of application for employment to a company, but you have not received a reply. Write a follow-up letter.

In the future, members of the consortium plan to discuss grading philosophies and to arrange public evening seminars in which community leaders explain and illustrate the types of writing that they do in their work. They hope to schedule training seminars in addition to the planning meetings.

Relationships between the English faculties of the member schools have improved dramatically. And another area community college is now interested in the consortium.

THE SUCCESSFUL ON-GOING CONSORTIUM

The success of both formal and informal technical writing consortia depends to a great extent on the leadership of the designated director, the commitment of the administration of each participating school and the number of schools involved.

The director must have the dedication to accept leadership responsibilities of the informal consortium on an overload basis, or he must have release time to supervise mailouts, newsletters, and organize field trips to area businesses. Full-time directors of formally structured consortia can schedule all the necessary seminars, develop a file of internship opportunities available in the area, visit interns on the job, and publicize current job opportunities.

The administration of each institution must be firmly committed to the technical writing consortium. The administration must offer encouragement to the involved faculty in terms of release time for seminars and public recognition. If they do not actively support the technical writing consortium, then it will fail. Usually faculty members cannot by themselves weld together a consortium of area schools.

The number of schools in the consortium often determines the success of the effort. The smaller the number, the more likelihood both of initial and continuing success. The alliance, like everything else, requires the personal touch. Annual meetings and semi-annual seminars are easier to schedule for fewer schools. A smaller group requires the representatives of each school to share ideas on writing assignments, classroom activities, field trips and guest speakers and to make the necessary contacts in the community.

The technical writing consortium--whether loosely organized or very formally structured--can develop an ongoing program vital to the prestige of the local university and the area community colleges and, finally, can provide the expertise that will guarantee its continued success.